Khalistan & Kashmir: A Tale of Two Conflicts

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While sharing many similarities in origin and tactics, separatist insurgencies in the Indian states of Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir have followed remarkably different trajectories. Whereas Punjab has largely returned to normalcy and been successfully re-integrated into India's political and economic framework, in Kashmir diminished levels of violence mask a deep-seated antipathy to Indian rule. Through a comparison of the socio-economic and political realities that have shaped the both regions, this paper attempts to identify the primary reasons behind the very different paths that politics has taken in each state. Employing a distinction from the normative literature, the paper argues that mobilization behind a separatist agenda can be attributed to a range of factors broadly categorized as either 'push' or 'pull'. Whereas Sikh separatism is best attributed to factors that mostly fall into the latter category in the form of economic self-interest, the Kashmiri independence movement is more motivated by 'push' factors centered on considerations of remedial justice. This difference, in addition to the ethnic distance between Kashmiri Muslims and mainstream Indian (Hindu) society, explains why the politics of separatism continues in Kashmir, but not Punjab.

Introduction

Of the many separatist insurgencies India has faced since independence, those in the states of Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir have proven the most destructive and potent threats to the country's territorial integrity. Ostensibly separate movements, the campaigns for Khalistan and an independent Kashmir nonetheless shared numerous similarities in origin and tactics, and for a brief time were contemporaneous. However, while the Kashmiri independence struggle endures, that for Khalistan has largely been relegated to the past. This is despite a substantial deterioration in Punjab's economic fortunes since the end of separatist violence in the mid-1990s, and disillusionment and fatigue amongst ordinary Kashmiris after more than twenty years of armed conflict. Curiously, while reduced economic status and welfare have failed to reignite separatist passions amongst Punjab's Sikhs, the desire to exit India amongst ordinary Kashmiris remains undiminished despite the realization of this goal being less feasible than at any time in the past.

The purpose of this paper is, through a comparison of the two movements, to shed light on the reasons why Sikh ethno-nationalism has largely been reconciled to Indian sovereignty while many Kashmiris still cling to the goal of *Azadi* (freedom from Indian rule). The comparison of different instances of a phenomenon is a valuable method for identifying causal factors and the

pathways by which these interact to bring about states of affairs. In the study of separatist conflict it is often employed to identify properties necessary, or sufficient, to mobilize public opinion behind a separatist agenda and armed struggle. Similarly, comparison with states that share many of the characteristics associated with separatism, but which do not experience separatist conflict, facilitates a more nuanced understanding of how causal factors interact with one another to produce separatism in some instances, but not others. For example, while poverty, corruption and economic discrimination are frequently cited as causes of separatist violence, neither Kashmir nor Punjab have exhibited particularly high levels of mis-governance, income inequality or deprivation in comparison to other Indian states.

The explanatory thesis pursued in this paper is that Kashmiri separatism is motivated more by reluctantly pursued, 'push' factors centered on considerations of remedial justice, while the Sikh separatist movement of the 1980/90s was premised more upon 'pull' considerations of rational self-interest, the viability of an independent, Sikh state and the economic and political opportunity costs of remaining within the Indian federation. Moreover, economic deregulation and mismanagement combined with a decline in Punjab's economic fortunes in comparison to other Indian states after the defeat of Sikh separatism in the mid-1990s have sharply reduced the economic and other 'pull' benefits of independent statehood. In contrast, Kashmiri separatism continues to rely much more on 'push' considerations of remedial justice premised upon central government interference, the broken promise of a plebiscite and human rights abuses. These factors, when combined with the ethnic distance between Kashmiris and mainstream Indian (Hindu) society explain why the question of Kashmir's independence from India continues to provoke violence while that of an independent Sikh state does not.

The paper is structured as follows: The following section defines separatism, summarizes the main features of the Sikh and Kashmiri struggles for independence and explores the similarities that bind them together as well as the differences that distinguish them. Section three looks at the starkly different realities in contemporary Punjab, which has largely eschewed separatism and political violence, and Jammu and Kashmir where separatist rhetoric and bloodshed remain defining features of the political landscape. The fourth section takes a critical look at some common explanations for why normalcy has been restored in Punjab and asks why these cannot convincingly account for the continuation of separatist violence in Kashmir. The case is then made for economic self-interest and national integration as pivotal factors in the trajectories of conflict in each state. Finally, section five makes some concluding remarks regarding the importance of these points for the integration of sub-national minorities in polities such as India that are characterized by considerable ethnic and religious diversity.

The Same but Different

Separatism is the advocacy of a state of cultural, ethnic, religious, racial or political separation from a parent state and its majority population. Consisting in a variety of positions along a continuum of independence, the Khalistan and Kashmiri independence movements pursued the extreme end of this spectrum – secession – and the complete separation of a coveted territory and its inhabitants from Indian sovereignty. Moreover, the two movements shared many similarities, in both origins and tactics, which also masked important differences between them. For example, both campaigns were premised upon ethno-religious claims of difference and injustice with a substantial historical pedigree. Kashmiris were self-governing during the Kashmiri Sultanate (1346-1586) and subsequently part of the Mughal, Afghan and Sikh empires before being ruled by the Dogra dynasty following the Treaty of Amritsar in 1846. The Dogra darbar's emphasis on tax collection at the expense of social and economic development created a societal vacuum occupied by indigenous Kashmiri forms of organization including an elaborate caste system and relative autonomy in religious matters centered around local mosques and *Mirwaizes* (head preachers) (Zutshi, 2004, Rai, 2004). The development of a distinctive Kashmiri identity was also assisted by the region's status as a distant outpost that was geographically isolated from the Dogra court. In contrast, while the Sikhs of Punjab share a similar provenance to Kashmiris, they have historically been more closely integrated with mainstream Hindu (Indian) society. This is partly a result of geography – Punjab being an extension of the Gangetic plains, unlike Kashmir which is isolated by often-impassable mountain ranges – and sociological linkages. To explain, because Sikhism originated in India during the sixteenth century, ethnic and sociological linkages with mainstream Hindu society remain. In contrast, many Kashmiris are descended from Moghuls and Persians and engage in cultural, religious and social practices that are Central Asian or Persian in origin.

As in the case of Kashmiri society, commonality of faith masked significant urban/rural, sectarian and economic divisions in Sikh society that were accompanied by tensions with an economically dominant Hindu class. Kashmiri society was controlled by a minority Hindu administrative class of Pandits, while the minority status of Sikhs against the numerically much larger, religiously-defined Hindu population served a similarly unifying function. The *Arya Samaj's* 1870 proselytization campaign and demands that the official language of government and schools be changed to Hindi in the Devanagri script (rather than the Gurmukhi script which is the language of the Sikh holy scriptures) prompted a reactionary stance by Sikh political and religious organizations (Chima, 2010) culminating in the Gurdwara Reform Movement of the 1920s. Subsequently, the *Sikh Gurdwaras and Shrines Bill* (1925) clarified what it meant to be a Sikh and created the *Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandak Committee* (SGPC) to administer shrines, effectively neutralizing moves by the *Arya Samaj* to include Sikhs as Hindus. Additionally, the 1921 Montagu-Chelmsford reforms created separate electorates for Sikhs in the

Punjab legislature in a process mirrored in Jammu and Kashmir where agitation resulted in political reforms spearheaded by various *Anjuman* (religious societies) that afforded the Muslim population limited representation in the state assembly.

In addition to a religiously-based identity with a considerable historical and institutional pedigree, there are additional similarities between the campaigns for Sikh and Kashmiri independence. For example, both movements were for a period contemporaneous – the Punjab crisis entered a violent phase during the 1982 *Dharam Yudh Morcha* and declined markedly from 1992-93, whereas largescale separatist violence erupted in Kashmir in 1989. Furthermore, both faiths have a strong tradition of martyrdom and mixing of religion and politics that sits ill at ease with Indian secular nationalism. In addition to the much misunderstood Islamic concept of *Jihad*, there is the Sikh concept of *miri-piri* that joins the temporal and spiritual realms to sanction religiously-regulated political action (Pettigrew, 1987). Moreover, politics in both states were cynically manipulated by the center under the leadership of Congress (I) Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, who, fearful of being seen as soft on minority interests, attempted to buttress her credentials in India's Hindu heartland by appearing tough on Sikh and Kashmiri separatism. This created a self-sustaining dynamic as greater interference and heavy-handedness by New Delhi reinforced anti-India sentiment and encouraged political factions to adopt progressively more radical positions to distance themselves from the central government and assume the mantle of protector of Sikh and Kashmiri identity (Singh, 1998).

To elaborate, in Punjab, revivalist ideologue Sant Jarnail Bhindranwale was empowered as a political counterforce to the Akali Dal by Mrs. Gandhi in an attempt to split the party's support base (Chima, 2010) that spectacularly backfired to produce a political and economic activism with an avowedly anti-India hue (Singh, 2007). The final break came in 1984 after Bhindranwale was killed in Operation Bluestar that led to the desecration of Sikhism's holiest shrine and the revenge assassination of Mrs. Gandhi. Moreover, in both states, following suspension of the legislative assembly and imposition of Governor's and President's rule, the center attempted to use electoral politics and alliances to neutralize political extremism and rehabilitate the political process, with little success. In Punjab, the 1985 state elections following the Rajiv-Longowal Accord were boycotted by major political players such as the Akali Dal (U) and All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF), leaving only the Akali Dal (L) and Congress (I) as the main contenders in a deeply flawed poll. Similarly, having reneged on its promise of a plebiscite to determine Kashmir's final status, New Delhi courted (and tolerated abuses of power by) the *Jammu and Kashmir National Conference Party* (NC) including: the disqualification of rival party candidates on frivolous grounds; patronage and favoritism in the award of government contracts, civil service positions and university admissions; and denial of citizens' legal and moral rights in consequence of abuse by officials and politicians. However, the arrangement of convenience came to an abrupt end after Mrs. Gandhi's 1984 dismissal of Chief Minister, Farooq Abdullah, caused a breakdown in law and order that transformed into open rebellion

following the widespread perception that legislative assembly elections in 1987 had been rigged to secure a Congress victory (Singh, 1996). As in the case of the 1985 elections in Punjab, the outcome was to strengthen the hand of radical elements by disempowering the major political parties from speaking the anti-center language of their respective communities.

Following the outbreak of violence in both states, the center also employed similarly heavy-handed tactics including: extra-judicial killings in fake encounters; the quasi-militarization of political and law enforcement institutions through the suspension of normal political processes and draconian law and order measures; and an initially ham-fisted counter-insurgency approach in consequence of undue reliance on the inadequately equipped and trained Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Border Security Force (BSF) and Rashtriya Rifles (RR) (Goswami, 2011). These units were eventually augmented with local police that were able to exploit the lack of horizontal associations across class and regional divisions that precluded a sustainable base of mass support (Deol, 2000) and saw Kashmiri and Sikh separatist groups disintegrate into local feuds, factional enmities, kinship retribution and criminality.

Another similarity is the widespread perception of economic discrimination and neglect. In Punjab this took the form of dislocations produced by the 'Green Revolution' where new strains of high-yield wheat and a double-cropping pattern caused farming to become steadily un-remunerative due to oversupply, the rising costs of inputs (tube wells, fertilizer, diesel oil and agricultural machinery), electricity cuts and irrigation shortages (Pettigrew, 1987). Rising literacy rates and the growth of a politically savvy younger generation frustrated by a lack of social mobility, graduate unemployment and increasing indebtedness are also cited as contributing factors in both conflicts. By 1974, in Punjab 78 per cent of primary school-age children were enrolled in school – the second highest figure of all Indian states – and literacy rose from 27 per cent in 1961 to 41 per cent in 1981, while the number of students enrolled in colleges increased from 35,000 in 1964-65 to over 110,000 in the mid-1970s (The Times of India, 2014). However, across all disciplines – with the exception of medicine and veterinary science – unemployment for Punjab's university graduates was up to five times higher than the Indian average (The Times of India, 2014). Similarly, in Kashmir literacy rates rose from 11.03 per cent in 1961 to 26.67 per cent in 1981 (Government of India, 1981, Government of India, 1988), secondary school enrolments increased from 5,600 in 1950 to 262,000 in 1992 (Government of Jammu and Kashmir, 1968, Government of India, 1995) and the number of newspapers increased from 46 in 1965 to 203 in 1984 (Government of India, 1978, Government of India, 1987, Ganguly, 1997). Both movements were also assisted by foreign diaspora that were a valuable source of funding, recruitment and publicity (Franchetti and Fielding, 2002) and foreign states – most notably Pakistan – which provided training, sanctuary and weapons (Chima, 2010, Swami, 2008), although this assistance was much more influential in the case of Kashmir (Biswas, 2013, Bose, 2003). Additionally, both communities were characterized by sectarian divisions that were exploited by New Delhi for tactical advantage, e.g. the conflict in Punjab concerning the

heterodox Nirankari sect and in Kashmir between extremist and more secular Islamic groups. Finally, the radicalization of the dominant faith in each state saw the exodus of minority Hindus as Pandits fled south from the Kashmir Valley for refugee camps in Jammu, and Hindu traders in Punjab relocated to escape extortion, looting, kidnapping and murder (Bal, 2005).

However, there are also important differences between the two movements. For example, Kashmir's political status was a contentious issue from the time of partition, whereas that of Punjab – despite a long tradition of anti-center political activism – only became so after independence and the call for a *Punjabi Suba* (state) with a Punjabi-speaking majority (Oberoi, 1987). The *Punjab State Reorganisation Act* (1966) finally acquiesced to this request as Hindi-speaking regions became the new state of Haryana or merged into Himachal Pradesh with the remainder of Punjab now being 54 per cent Sikh and 44 per cent Hindu (Kapur, 1987) – the pre-partition state had been 51 per cent Muslim, 35 per cent Hindu and 12 per cent Sikh (Deol, 2000). In contrast, Jammu and Kashmir's borders have remained static since 1947 and regional rivalry has manifested as resentment by Buddhist-majority Ladakh and Hindu-majority Jammu at the Muslim-majority Kashmir Valley's dominance of political and economic institutions in a state that is 68.3 per cent Muslim – the Kashmir Valley is 98 per cent Muslim (Government of India, 2011a). Finally, while ethno-religious identity underpinned both movements, there are important differences in how this manifested, e.g. in Punjab the issue of language was a rallying point, but not in Kashmir. Similarly, religious revivalism, moderation and abstention of vice were arguably more of a focus for mobilization in Punjab than Kashmir, due in large measure to the state's rapid economic modernization and urbanization that had undermined customary norms in the form of alcohol, tobacco, narcotics and lewd cinema (Singh, 2007).

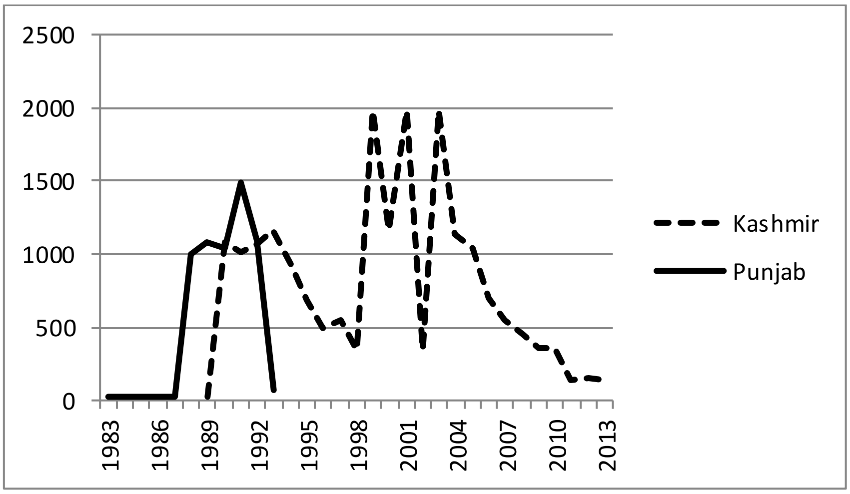
A Return to Normalcy of Sorts

Following the widespread breakdown in law and order that by 1992 saw large swathes of Punjab governed by separatist *diktat* (Chima, 2010), New Delhi implemented a range of reforms that were later adapted to Kashmir. In a re-organization of the Punjab Police, new senior posts were created; K. P. S. Gill was re-appointed chief of police and there was mass recruitment at the constable and the special constable levels. The strengthening of other forces combatting the separatists, notably the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and Border Security Force (BSF), complemented local police forces and the border with Pakistan was more effectively policed to reduce the cross-border flow of arms and personnel. Nine additional divisions of the Indian Army brought the peak deployment in Punjab to 120,000 army personnel in 1992 (Singh, 1996). Strict, anti-terrorist legislation including the *National Security Act* (1980), *Punjab Disturbed Areas Ordinance* (1983), *Terrorist Areas (Special Courts) Act* (1984), and the *Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA)* (1985) were applied with renewed vigor.

Additionally, the government abandoned its maladroit political stance where the appointment of hardline governors – Siddhartha Shankar Ray in Punjab, and Girish Saxena and Jagmohan Malhotra in Kashmir – had failed to stem separatist violence. Legislative assembly elections in 1992 in Punjab returned the Congress to power but the elections were boycotted by all separatist and most moderate Akali groups with a voter turnout of only 23.8 per cent (Election Commission of India, 1992). However, elections to urban municipal councils later in 1992 and village *panchayats* in January 1993 recorded more respectable turnouts of 70 and 82 per cent respectively (Verma, 1995). The result was a clear demonstration of the growing legitimacy of the electoral process and repudiation of the politics of violence practiced by separatists whose banditry and brutality had alienated most of the local population (Chima, 2002, Puri et al., 1999, Singh, 1998, Pettigrew, 1987). Indeed, both Sikh and Kashmiri separatists increasingly engaged in criminality, 'loot-seeking' and other predatory behavior characteristic of 'pull' explanations of separatism, indicating a need to distinguish between a movement's formal, ideological claims and the actions of its membership which often change over time with a corresponding increase in the number and brutality of human rights abuses perpetrated by separatists. The success of the center's political process was affirmed in the 1997 legislative elections which delivered the Congress party its worst ever defeat and returned the mantle of leadership in the state to Sikh-centric, but not separatist, parties. Analogously, 1996 legislative assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir saw the National Conference win 57 of the available 87 seats with a turnout of 53.92 per cent (Election Commission of India, 1996).

A reinvigorated political process combined with military success dramatically reduced levels of violence in both states and raised the opportunity costs for those determined to continue the armed struggle against Indian rule. The result was a self-perpetuating effect where departure of cadres diminished the separatists' ability to engage in collective action (including rent generating activities) and, therefore, adequately reward remaining members, resulting in further defections in a negative feedback loop. Additional government measures such as depriving the insurgents of local support, amnesties, increased investment and a public willingness to negotiate and make concessions reduced separatism's rhetorical appeal, marginalised hardliners (Lacina, 2007) and contributed to the dramatic reduction in violence.

Fig.1 Fatalities in Separatist Violence in Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir 1983-2013



Source: Uppsala Conflict Data Program

However, the appearance of normalcy can be deceptive. In both states, levels of violence have fallen dramatically in comparison to earlier years as demonstrated in Fig.1. Nonetheless, separatist politics and independence from Indian rule remain emotional issues for Kashmiri Muslims in a manner not true of Punjab's Sikhs. In Jammu and Kashmir in 2015 there were 174 fatalities in 'terrorist' violence while the same figure for Punjab was ten (Shukla, 2005). Moreover, the mainstream media in Kashmir is preoccupied on a daily basis with reports of inflammatory rhetoric, strikes, protests and violent incidents that are separatist-linked or inspired. Indeed, even a casual observer or visitor to the region quickly gets the sense that the question of Kashmir's political status remains, as much as New Delhi might wish otherwise, the dominant idiom in Kashmiri political discourse. In contrast, the restoration of law and order in Punjab has seen the campaign for Khalistan effectively relegated to the past as a misguided episode in Sikh history unworthy of nostalgia or resurrection. This is despite quite severe problems of governance, policing and the economy that regularly result in public protest and disturbances. However, while political and anti-government activism in Punjab is very much alive, the same overwhelmingly cannot be said of separatism, ethno-religious mobilization or other extra-constitutional processes by which Sikhs might collectively organize to achieve political goals. The contrasting realities that divide the two states are also evident in voter participation; turnout in legislative assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir in 2014 and 2008 was 65.52 and 61.16 respectively (Election Commission of India, 2014, Election Commission of India, 2008) compared to 78.20 and 75.45 in 2012 and 2007 for Punjab (Election Commission of India, 2007, Election Commission of India, 2012).

Moreover, factors that help to explain the decline of separatism in Punjab are also pertinent to Kashmir where they have not had the same effect, while many differences between the two states do not offer a compelling reason why separatism remains the dominant idiom of Kashmiri Muslim (but not Sikh) politics. For example, the religious, economic and caste divisions that fractured the campaign for Khalistan into rival movements and facilitated government infiltration and the eventual defeat of Sikh separatism are also applicable to Kashmiri independence groups. As in Punjab, the Kashmiri independence movement consisted of a range of ideologically opposed groups with unstable memberships that were prone to internal rivalries and infiltration by government agents. Additionally, the unsuitability of Punjab's flat topography for guerrilla warfare, while clearly a relevant factor, cannot on its own explain why Kashmiri Muslims cling to the hope for independence despite the odds being, as they were in the case of the Khalistan movement, heavily stacked against them.

Similarly, consider the contemporary political landscape in Punjab where major institutional players – e.g. the Akali Dal, SGPC and Akal Takht – have adopted a strategy of moderation and reconciliation with New Delhi (Chima, 2015). This raises the question of why these groups (but not their Kashmiri counter-parts) no longer find it in their interest to support the cause of independent statehood. One possible explanation is the integration of regional and religious parties within India's political fabric as coalition partners at both state and federal levels in a process that has seen the former model of 'confrontational regionalism' supplanted by one of 'cooperative federalism.' Interventionist policies in the 1980-90s such as the dismissal of democratically elected state governments, vote rigging and human rights abuses violated the legal-rational basis of the state's legitimacy (Chima, 2002) and proved a potent mobilization factor in Sikh and Kashmiri separatism. In contrast, the contemporary political reality effectively precludes the central government disregarding democratic norms and provides parties such as the Akalis more of an incentive to play by the rules of India's 'democratic game' as valued participants. However, the same factors are also applicable to Kashmiri-centric parties, e.g. the People's Democratic Party (PDP) has allied with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to form the state government in Jammu and Kashmir, while the NC has allied with the Congress Party at both state and federal levels. Clearly, then, if we are to understand the reasons for continuing separatist sentiment in Kashmir, but not Punjab, we need to look beyond these factors to explore more pertinent features of each movement.

Why Kashmir continues to be a problem but not Punjab

Explanatory factors for the development of separatism are frequently grouped into 'greed' and 'grievance' categories. Whereas the former are premised on calculations of rational self-interest and expected utility, the latter are 'justice-seeking' and emphasize socio-psychological features such as human rights violations and economic, religious, ethnic or some other kind of discrimination. Neither model is able to account for all instances of separatism while

motivations germane to both accounts, which are neither mutually exclusive nor constant, may overlap and merge. For example, the decision to redress a grievance may be influenced by calculations of rational self-interest, while government oppression may transform a greed-seeking movement into more of a justice (or revenge) seeking one. Perhaps, then, a more helpful way of approaching the two accounts that mirrors an important distinction in the normative literature on separatism (Buchanan, 1997), is from a 'pull' and 'push' perspective. Thus, whereas factors pertaining to greed make secession more attractive, 'pulling' groups toward the goal of independent statehood (or irredentism), grievances 'push' groups towards it as a reluctantly pursued objective. The distinction is important because in the former type of theory even states that treat minorities justly may suffer from separatism. Conversely, in the latter case, the absence of serious injustice means that a group will be content to remain a constituent component of the parent state.

I contend that the two primary factors pertinent to understanding why separatism continues to be a problem in Kashmir, but not Punjab, are economic self-interest and ethno-national accommodation. Beginning with the former factor, of critical importance is the relative decline of the state in citizens' lives. Until reforms begun in the early 1990s under the Narashima Rao administration, the Indian state loomed large as the dominant economic actor. It maintained this position through heavy government control and extensive regulation in the form of strong protectionist measures, intervention in labor and financial markets, wide-ranging bureaucratic jurisdiction and the nationalization of key industries such as electricity generation, steel-making, telecommunications and insurance that created government monopolies with large rent generating capacities. The state's economic hegemony was complemented by an extensive apparatus of coercion through intelligence gathering, law enforcement and military networks that enabled power-holders to perpetuate and extend their sphere of authority. Consequently, control of the state and its extensive apparatus became the primary objective of political actors who, once in a position of power, excluded rival and marginalized groups that increasingly resorted to extra-constitutional methods to advance their agendas (Sangmpam, 2007).

Increasingly, however, processes of economic and political deregulation combined with institutional decay have rendered the Indian state a passive observer in many arenas, the corollary of which has been a diminishment in the economic benefits of statehood and, therefore, the pull factor behind separatism. In India, for example, tariffs and interest rates were reduced, many public monopolies were ended and foreign direct investment increased from US$132 million in 1991-92 (Singh and Ranawana, 1996) to US$31 billion in the first half of 2015 (Fingar, 2015). As the sclerotic, moribund controlling influence of the central government relaxed, private enterprise and wealth creation flourished and government employment ceased to be the predominant avenue of economic, political and social advancement for individuals. Whereas in the 1980s, when the Sikh and Kashmiri independence movements blossomed, government ministries were powerful social and economic players, today new industries in telecommunications and manufacturing, government outsourcing and

entrepreneurship mean that non-state actors and networks offer greater opportunities for social and economic progress. It is no mere coincidence that diminished levels of separatist violence have accompanied the increased role of the market in resource allocation across India as distributional struggles become de-politicized (Steinberg and Saideman, 2008) and the state retreats across the spectrum of Indian society.

There are good reasons to believe that the benefits of economic change have accrued more to Sikhs in Punjab than Kashmiris and, therefore, that they have less reason to feel aggrieved and want to exit the Indian Union. For example, 2013-14 per capita income in Punjab was 58 per cent higher than in Jammu and Kashmir (Government of India, 2015) and over the previous ten years had increased on average by 0.83 per cent per annum more than in Jammu and Kashmir (Government of India, 2014e). Similarly, graduate unemployment – identified as a key driver of conflict – has diminished in Punjab from 28,221 in 1980 and 35,934 in 1990 to 19,106 in 2014, while unemployment amongst over 15 year olds is notably higher in Jammu and Kashmir (4.7 per cent) than Punjab (2.5 per cent) (Government of India, 2014d). Finally, on numerous other significant indicators of development (e.g. access to electricity, home ownership, percentage of the population below the poverty line, toilet availability and human development indicators) Punjab also scores significantly better than Jammu and Kashmir (Government of India, 2011a, Reserve Bank of India, 2013, Government of India, 2011b).

Nonetheless, it is important to consider the relative economic decline of Punjab, which is no longer the envy of other Indian states that it once was, when making these kinds of comparisons to Kashmir. To explain, the Sikh separatist movement of the 1980-90s was in part a justice-seeking (push) movement premised upon perceived discrimination on the part of the central government concerning the creation of a Punjabi Suba and popular Sikh grievances that manifested after Operation Bluestar and the anti-Sikh pogroms that followed the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi. However, for the most part, economic rationalist (pull) factors were more predominant than in the case of Kashmir, and exploited Punjab's status as the richest, least poverty-afflicted state in India (Bakke, 2015), routinely lauded as the country's 'wheat basket'. Not only did this give Sikh separatists considerable bargaining power (at least in their own minds) vis-à-vis the Indian government, but it also enabled them to convincingly argue for the viability of an independent Sikh state in consequence of the perceived economic benefits that would result from greater control of agricultural production and other economic factors, and exploit sentiments of exploitation amongst rural Sikhs, e.g. pertaining to the diversion of electricity and river waters to other (non-riparian) Indian states (Pettigrew, 1987). In contrast, Jammu and Kashmir's post-secession economic prospects were far from assured. Agriculture in Kashmir – because of the region's topography, crops produced, and lack of direct rail links with the rest of India – was not amenable to the modernization and increase in yields achieved in Punjab. Consequently, Kashmiri separatist leaders overlooked the state's economic dependence on central government handouts and instead relied on fanciful portrayals of

Kashmir as a ‘Switzerland of the East’ and tourist hub to make their case for the region’s post secession economic viability. In addition, the Soviet Union’s withdrawal from Afghanistan and subsequent collapse was exploited to encourage optimism amongst Kashmiris that defeating a much larger and technologically developed foe to win their independence was a feasible proposition. Therefore, separatist sentiment in Kashmir relied much more on justice (push), rather than economic self-interest (pull), seeking motivations than in Punjab. Central government interference in state politics, the broken promise of a plebiscite, human rights abuses and other grievances were complemented with a blind, but often simplistic and naïve, faith in Kashmir’s ability to prosper as an independent state or a part of Pakistan.

The contemporary situation in Punjab is considerably different and helps to explain the decline of separatism in Punjab, but not Kashmir. Since the economic reforms of the 1990’s Punjab has slowly surrendered ground as an exemplar of development and growth for other Indian states to emulate. While Punjab’s gross state domestic product increased on average by 11.90 per cent in the 2001-14 period, the same figure for Jammu and Kashmir was 13.64 per cent and in 2014 Punjab was ranked eleventh in India in 2014 by gross state domestic product (Government of India, 2014a), thirteenth by nominal gross domestic product (GDP) (Government of India, 2014a) and tenth by per capita GDP (Government of India, 2014e). In addition, the state has become increasingly dependent on central government grants that at the conclusion of militancy in 1997-98 comprised only 4.61 per cent of Punjab’s revenue receipts (Government of India, 2014c) but by 2014 had increased to 15.41 per cent (Government of Punjab, 2013). This is on top of rising public debt from Rs 77,158 crore in 2011-12 (Government of Punjab, 2014) to a projected Rs 1.13 lakh crore in 2015 (it had been only Rs 15,250 crore in 1996-97) (Government of India, 2016, Kaur, 2014). Thus, whereas once Sikh political elites could convincingly claim that Punjab disproportionately contributed to the upkeep of the Indian Union, today the opposite is true. Partly a consequence of fiscal mismanagement, water shortages and a lack of diversification and investment, Punjab’s relative decline has also been brought about by post de-regulation development in states such as Maharashtra, Gujarat, Bangalore and Tamil Nadu. Consequently, while there remains an economic dimension to political activism and anti-government sentiment amongst Punjab’s Sikhs, it manifests in markedly different ways to when separatism was a political force in the state and the center’s denial of independent statehood was popularly viewed as a repudiation of Punjab’s economic sovereignty and status.

Against this decline Jammu and Kashmir’s progress, or lack of, is relatively unremarkable. The state is one of ten special category states that is unable to generate sufficient revenue from its own resources and is therefore disproportionately dependent upon central government largesse. In 1996-97, central government grants constituted 65.71 per cent of the state’s revenue receipts. By 2000-01, despite a 76 per cent increase in total revenue receipts, the percentage of central government grants remained largely unchanged at 66.68 per cent (Government of India, 2014b). While the situation has improved

somewhat over the last 15 years – the Jammu and Kashmir 2015-16 budget estimated that central government grants would comprise only 44 per cent of revenue receipts – the state remains heavily dependent upon central government assistance. For example, the reduction in central government grants as a proportion of state revenue has only been possible because of Jammu and Kashmir's share of central taxes almost doubling since 2013-14 (Government of Jammu and Kashmir, 2015). Consequently, whereas Punjab has witnessed a marked decline in its economic fortunes and status vis-à-vis other Indian states since the development of separatist violence, Kashmir's poor fortunes remain unchanged.

It is my contention that Punjab's relative economic decline, combined with nationalist factors pertinent to Kashmiri Muslims (but not Punjabi Sikhs), explains why separatism continues in Kashmir but not Punjab. Whereas once Sikhs in Punjab could justifiably entertain perceptions of victimhood due to their privileged standing as residents of India's wealthiest state – a status that was not reflected in the reality of daily life in rural Punjab where farming was becoming steadily less remunerative – now claims of economic bias and discrimination are much harder to sustain. Simply put, the economic benefits to Punjab of being part of the Indian Union are today much more palpable than in the 1980s. Aside from wealth transfers from the center in the form of grants, tax revenue and loans there is also the financial and trade benefits of being part of a national economy that posts GDP growth rates of up to 9 per cent per annum. Absent justifiable claims of economic discrimination, the case for an independent Sikh state rests on push factors such as cultural, political, religious or some other kind of discrimination that are equally difficult to sustain; Sikhism shares historical and doctrinal linkages with Hinduism that facilitate its inclusion within India's secularist national ideology, while Sikhs have a long and proud tradition of military service and are well integrated into the political and economic fabric of Indian society.

Conversely, consider the situation of Kashmiris whose economic status remains largely unchanged and, as Muslims, profess a faith that sets them apart from the Indian mainstream in a manner unlike any of India's other ethno-national minorities. Whereas Punjabi Sikhs now economically have more to lose were they to secede from India, Kashmiris would not be much worse off today as an independent state (or part of Pakistan) than at the outbreak of separatist violence in 1989. More to the point, if Kashmiris were not swayed by considerations of economic self-interest in 1989, then why would they be now after having suffered so much from decades of conflict? Unlike the Sikh separatist movement, economic self-interest (pull) was never an important factor in Kashmiri separatist mobilization. Instead, push factors in the form of structured patterns of dominance and subordination, inherited attitudes and power relations (Varshney, 2003) and Kashmiris' history of suffering at the hands of outsiders, combined with ethnicity and religion, to mobilize Kashmiris behind the goal of separatism.

The addition of shared features such as religion, ethnicity, language, historical recollections and culture are essential to transform individual

experience into shared grievance and collective action necessary to mobilize separatist sentiment. In this regard ethnic 'distance' is also important to developing the cohesion necessary to sustaining conflict, preventing defection and infiltration by members of the majority (Caselli and Coleman, 2006). Furthermore, the distance between Kashmiris and Hindus is clearly greater than that between Sikhs and Hindus. For example, although they employ different alphabets, Punjabi is linguistically closer to Hindi than Koshur, while Kashmiris' Central Asian and Persian heritage sets them apart from Hindu India in a manner that is untrue of many Punjabi or Sikh rituals, practices and conventions.

Moreover, while the distance that separates Kashmiris from mainstream Indian (Hindu) society is no greater than that of other sub-national minorities in India that do not experience separatism, Kashmiri ethnic identity *is* distinct due to the status of Islam as the litmus test of Indian secular nationalism. The question of Muslim loyalty has an existential dimension absent in demands by other sub-national minorities in India for political autonomy. Muslim invasions of the subcontinent that began in the twelfth century initiated a historical dynamic that culminated in the 1947 partition and genocide from which the modern states of South Asia were formed. The context provided by this history exaggerates the relatively modest distance between Kashmiris, on the one hand, and the other historical communities of India and the Indian establishment, on the other hand, with the result that claims of difference, neglect and discrimination assume a level of significance that evinces exaggerated emotional reactions and public mobilization. For Indian policy makers and political elites, even the discussion of increased autonomy for Kashmir raises the spectre of a repudiation of India's secular nationalism without parallel that can never be countenanced. For other sub-national minorities, such as Punjab's Sikh population, the granting of statehood, devolution of political power, special recognition of their language and culture does not raise the same existential questions and passions as the question of Kashmir's status as the only Muslim-majority state in an overwhelmingly Hindu, but secular, polity such as India. Similarly, for Kashmiris the contextualization of their claims within wider questions of nation-building, unfinished business from the 1947 partition and Hindu-Muslim relations in the sub-continent gives their struggle a heightened significance absent in the more general question of how to properly recognize the rights of ethno-nationalist minorities. The consequence is that the heightened sense of grievance, emotional rhetoric and 'raised stakes' leads to exaggerated claims and overly aggressive postures on both sides that enormously complicate the dispute and its peaceful resolution. Finally, these considerations are also pertinent to the internationalization of the dispute and Pakistan's assistance to Kashmiri, but less so to Sikh, separatists that has enabled Kashmiri separatists to continue their campaign of violence. While Kashmir's status as a Muslim-majority state validates India secular nationalism, its presence in India abutting Pakistan is an affront to that country's founding as a homeland for the Muslims of South Asia.

Conclusion

Ascribing a pivotal role to religious identity in the development of Kashmiri separatism is potentially problematic because it suggests intractability that is reminiscent of the widely critiqued primordialist accounts of ethnic conflict. However, acknowledging the complex and peculiar dynamics of Kashmiri identity and its accommodation within the constraints of Indian secular nationalism does not entail a commitment to the view that separatism is somehow 'hardwired' into Kashmiri political consciousness. Rather, Kashmir is problematic because it highlights the contradiction of India's founding ideology that provides no formal role for religion in public affairs, in a society in which religion is the primary vehicle for individual identification and inter-personal bonds (Mitra, 1991). The same, however, is true of numerous institutions and artifices in Indian society and, indeed, most states. India, for example, is no more democratic than it is secular, however this does not prevent the effective functioning of institutions of popular sovereignty. It does, however, result in visible fault lines that require attentive regulation and careful management. More specifically, the corollary of acknowledging the exceptional character of Kashmiri identity is recognition that a 'one size fits all' approach to handling relations with ethno-nationalist minorities is incapable of delivering optimal results; what worked in Punjab and elsewhere will not always be effective in Kashmir.

In contrast to Sikh ethno-nationalism which could be nullified through a combination of effective military action, the promotion of economic self-interest and reintegration of Sikhs into the Indian mainstream, Kashmiri separatism may not be special, but it *is* different. Moreover, Indian intransigence and an unwillingness to consider even standard solutions speak to this difference. For example, from the *States Reorganization Act* (1956) to the 2014 creation of Telangana the devolution of political power and award of statehood has been one of New Delhi's favored, and most effective, methods of neutralizing separatist sentiment. However, it has steadfastly resisted suggestions to split Jammu and Kashmir into Buddhist (Ladakh), Hindu (Jammu) and Muslim (the Kashmir Valley) regions despite calls from all three regions to do so. Other factors, such as Pakistan and China's proximity and long history of foreign meddling in Kashmir, also limit the solutions available to New Delhi. Nonetheless, until Indian policy makers are prepared to attempt new solutions they will continue to experience the same, old problems.

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